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SUBJECT: CASAMANCE: ESCALATION IN REBEL ATTACKS

#### SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On December 20, Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC) combatants ambushed a Senegalese army vehicle near the village of Kagnaru, north of Bignona. Two soldiers died, and 14 suffered injuries. One day before, a Senegalese army vehicle struck a fresh landmine in the outskirts of Sindian, an area reoccupied by military forces in mid-August to combat radical MFDC elements led by Movement for the Liberation of the People of the Casamance (MLPC) leader Salif Sadio. These recent attacks vary from the more typical acts of banditry that generally involve vehicle hijackings and robbing occupants' possessions. The recent hostile attacks appear to be deliberate moves to preempt the GOS's decision to remove landmines from the Casamance with Moroccan assistance. Landmines are the MFDC's weapon of choice, and rebels seem intent on violently resisting any effort to remove them prior to a negotiated peace agreement. END SUMMARY.

#### PEACE PROCESS STALLED

2. (SBU) In late November, President Abdoulaye Wade received a group of traditional leaders from the Diouloulou area who offered to mediate the conflict. On December 17, the Senegalese Army Corps of Engineers started demining in the area of Sindian. In both initiatives, the GOS acted unilaterally, having failed to consult MFDC leaders.

3. (SBU) The demining operation is led by Moroccan forces, following President Wade's call for help from the international community, and a subsequent agreement signed during Moroccan King Mohamed VI's November visit to Senegal. The GOS optimistically announced that the removal of landmines would take two months. However, Handicap International, a demining NGO active locally, says the timeframe is not realistic given the extent of the problem and the limited resources of the Senegalese army. A senior MFDC member told EmbOff that he believes the GOS is using demining as an excuse to secure Moroccan help in capturing MFDC Atika faction/MPLC leader Sadio.

#### SADIO IS MORE DANGEROUS NOW

4. (SBU) Recent violent attacks against the Senegalese army signal a major change in the MFDC/MLPC's strategy of the last six years, which was characterized by a lack of direct confrontation between GOS and MFDC forces. Recent attacks have targeted troops involved in demining operations. The nature of the December 20 attack, which took place in open areas near villages, shows that Sadio's men are willing to take major risks. Likely feeling pressure from the GOS, Sadio has become radicalized and is expanding the fight to previously peaceful areas, which had been attack free for several years.

COMMENT

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¶5. (SBU) The lack of GOS effort to promote the Casamance peace process, coupled with the suspension of government subsidies to the MFDC and the illness of MFDC founder Father Diamacoune Senghor, who is currently undergoing medical treatment in France, has left more room for radical civilian and MFDC leaders to operate. Sadio and other radicals may launch more violent attacks against the army. Under pressure from the Senegalese army and unable to operate in Guinea-Bissau, Sadio may scatter his combatants and their sympathizers and launch a new campaign of small attacks with the potential to create more suffering in the region. Sadio's staying power could also attract combatants from other factions who still believe in independence to rally behind him. END COMMENT.

¶6. (U) For additional background on the Casamance conflict, visit Embassy Dakar's classified website at <http://www.state.sgov/gov/p/af/dakar/>.

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